Published and Copyright (c) 1999 - 2004
All Rights Reserved

Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

David Newman
Kevin Savetz

To subscribe to A-ONE, change e-mail addresses, or unsubscribe,
log on to our website at: www.atarinews.org
and click on "Subscriptions".
OR subscribe to A-ONE by sending a message to: dpj@atarinews.org
and your address will be added to the distribution list.
To unsubscribe from A-ONE, send the following: Unsubscribe A-ONE
Please make sure that you include the same address that you used to
subscribe from.

To download A-ONE, set your browser bookmarks to one of the
following sites:

http://people.delphiforums.com/dpj/a-one.htm
http://www.icwhen.com/aone/
http://a1mag.atari.org
Now available:
http://www.atarinews.org

Visit the Atari Advantage Forum on Delphi!
http://forums.delphiforums.com/atari/

=~=~=~=

~ PayPal Safety Warning! ~ People Are Talking! ~ Google Local Search
~ Detecting Pedophiles! ~ States After Music P2P ~ Hotmail Waylaid!
~ PhillyClassic News! ~ Phatboy Danger Lowered ~ Steem 3.1 Released!
~ Anti-Spam Law Useless? ~ Take-Two Probe ShakeUp ~ Famous Wills Online

-* EU: No Deal For Microsoft! *-
-* Spam Eroding U.S. Trust In E-Mail! *-
-* EU Backs Commission Plan Against Microsoft *-

=~=~=~=

->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

I knew it!! I knew that when I mentioned that we were lucky last week and missed a couple of snowstorms, it was going to come back and bite me! Sure enough, earlier this week we got hammered with a typical Nor'easter. Just under a foot of snow fell. So much for Spring arriving tomorrow, except on the calendar! After 50-plus years of living in New England, I should know better than to think Spring weather will actually arrive in time to match the calendar. I think that the only green that we're going to see is on all of the people watching or participating in the various St. Patrick's Day parades this weekend! Oh well. The good side of all of this, at least for all of you, is that I just don't have it in me this week to write much!

Until next time...

=~=~=~=

Steem v3.1 Released

This is a bit sooner than intended but Steem v3.1 has been released. Mostly this version is here to fix a few small bugs that appeared in v3, but we fixed a few more old bugs while we were at it.

-- Emulation Bugs Fixed --
. Hard drive Pexec mode 4 bug (Devpac, Turbo Assembler).
. Hard drive double intercept bug.
. Hard drive seek bug (Spacola).
. Joystick fire when mouse enabled bug (Starglider).
. More unusual characters allowed in hard drive filenames.
. Fixed hard drive file times.
. Video address write bug (Ambition Demo, Apathetic Games).

-- Other Bugs Fixed --
. Fixed NT LPT port access slowdown.
. Fixed port repeating output byte when offline bug.
. Extract archive to hard drive folder bug fixed.
. Fixed hard drive problems with the Steem disk imager.

-- New Features --
. Take screenshot button

Download the update from the new Steem website URL
http://steem.atari.st/
(thanks to Rich of LGD for the hosting, and Silver Surfer for the hosting and php stuff).

Russell and Anthony Hayward

=~=~=~=

PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. As we get closer and closer to spring, Mother Nature seems to want to empty her bag of tricks on the Northeast all at once.

After several 60 degree (Fahrenheit) days, we've had one moderate snow storm here, with another one on the way. It's not the most unusual thing to have ever happened here, but it's by no means 'usual'.

On another front, my physical therapy is progressing, and I have high hopes of regaining all of my former strength and range of motion. The off-and-on nerve pain, I'm not so sure about, but we'll see what happens.

Having to go for physical therapy for something like this makes me wonder about how our ancestors dealt with these things. I mean, I didn't actually DO anything to cause this. It's really something that could happen to anyone, I guess. You know the warnings people will give you about watching how you lift, how you bend down, even how you sneeze? Well, there's a reason that people mention it over and over. We really are fairly frail creatures.

So in days gone by, what would someone have done with a herniated disc? Would they have simply laid down and waited for their end to come? Would they have sought out a local shaman or witch doctor? I really don't know. While Ultrasound and MRI imaging weren't available (ultrasound is used as a treatment in addition to being used as a diagnostic tool) back in the mists of time, they led a much simpler life for the most part, and might even have been able to work around many problems that seem impossible to us.

If you were lucky enough to not be a slave or indentured servant eons ago, you might very well have been able to avoid the types of activity that led to a particular problem in the first place. And ancient medical practices, while they may have lacked the hard science of today's more clinical practices, must have held at least some hope.

Even our distant cousins, the Neanderthals, must have practiced some forms of healing, since Neanderthal bones have been found with healed injuries.

Even some injuries that would surely have impeded the individual's ability to survive. Obviously, the injured individuals had been cared for by others.... some of the injured individuals would have had to be cared for for years. Just another 'cosmic billboard' for the value of family, I guess.

Well, that's enough of my babbling for now. Let's get to the news, hints, tips and info available on the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Mike Freeman asks a very interesting question about USB for the ST:

"Just one question: If the Atari 2600 can have USB (even if it is only for joysticks), why can't we?"

Richard Kilpatrick asks Mike:

"And is there a 2600 clone out now which offers more than one player? My gripe with the single joystick type is that it's only for one player, making Pong etc rather pointless."

Mike tells Richard:

"Sorry, I should have mentioned it's posted on Atari.Org. It's called Stelladapter. It's a 2600 to USB adapter for using USB joysticks.

All the 2600's I've ever had included two joystick ports. I used to play head-to-head pong against all of my friends and family way back when... Is yours different?"

'PuffPuffin' tells Mike:

"You got it reversed. It's an Atari joystick adapter for PCs with USB. So now, a PC/Mac user can use Atari joysticks, paddles, keypads, etc with Windows/MacOS games, MAME and Atari emulators. I plan to get one as I _HATE_ playing arcade-type games with an analog joystick!

Check out their website:
http://www.pixelspast.com/products/

Someone in Australia is working on a USB adapter for the ST. I don't recall the website."

Mike tells 'Puff':

"Ok, sorry, I mis-read. Well, we need USB anyway, so I'm glad to hear it's being worked on! Thanks for the correction!"

Stephen Moss adds:

"Actually there are a couple of different people working on USB for

Atari Systems, Guus Assmann is working on one for the 8 bit XL/XE system and someone else is working on one for the ST. As the second person has basically copied Guus's circuit they will be virtually identical, both plugging into the cartridge port.

It is however my opinion that their approach is flawed and having informed them of the reasons for my opinion they seem confident that they are correct, time will tell. I happen to be working on a USB Joystick to Jaguar adaptor, if I can get it to work it will be easy to convert the hardware to connect to a cartridge port for use with an Atari computer although someone would need to write the software. You should note though that due to the fast through put of data from some USB devices most Atari users will probably be limited to low speed devices such as Joystick, Printers and possibly Scanners as the computers just wont be fast enough to read in the data."

'Sam F' asks about playing media files:

"What do I need to be able to play demos such as the "Snowman" and the "California Raisins" on my Falcon?"

Janez Valant replies, somewhat tongue-in-cheek:

"An ST. For demos rather check Falcon directories of ftp's"

Well folks, that's it for this week. I know it's short, but message traffic has been kind of light in the NewsGroup and I find that I need to go put something warm and wet on my neck to dull the pain (jeez, you've got a filthy mind.... I like that. ;-))

'Till next week, make sure you pay attention to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

=~=~=~=

->In This Week's Gaming Section - Probe Causes Take-Two Shakeup!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Atari Ships Unreal Tournament 2004!
  More PhillyClassic News!

=~=~=~=

->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Take-Two Founder Resigns Amid Probe

Video-game publisher Take-Two Interactive Software Inc. said founder Ryan Brant, who along with the company is under investigation for accounting violations, has resigned as chairman and director.

Brant will be vice president of publishing at the New York-based company, which counts among its successes the popular "Grand Theft Auto" series of games.

Richard W. Roedel, a Take-Two director and chairman of the audit committee, will take over as the company's non-executive chairman.

"I believe this is the right time to make a management transition to position Take-Two for the future," Brant said in a statement.

Take-Two spokesman Ed Nebb said the decision was Brant's own, and wasn't related to any accounting issues.

The Securities and Exchange Commission is investigating the company's accounting, which has recently seen massive restatements. The SEC has warned that it plans civil action against the company, Brant, another current employee and two former officers.

Take-Two has said it is in talks with the SEC, which launched its investigation in February 2002 to look at the way the company booked sales and treated returns from smaller retailers.

In an unusual move, Banc of America Securities analyst Gary Cooper called for Brant's resignation in February, citing his sale of 350,000 shares of company stock last year, more than half of his holdings.

On Tuesday, Cooper upgraded the stock to "buy" from "neutral," writing in a research note that Brant "had been the one constant through Take-Two's years of accounting struggles and uneven operational performance."

Shares of Take-Two closed Tuesday up $2.14, or 6.7 percent, at $34.14 on the Nasdaq Stock Market.

Brant founded the company in 1993. In the fiscal year that ended Oct. 31, Take-Two earned $100 million on $1 billion in revenue.

Atari Ships Unreal Tournament 2004

Latest in the Unreal Tournament Franchise Redefines PC Multiplayer Mayhem

Game Earns "Editor's Choice" Awards on GameSpy.com, IGN.com

Online PC gaming is Unreal again! Atari and Epic Games have shipped Unreal Tournament 2004, the highly anticipated follow-up to last year's Unreal Tournament 2003 and the third installment in the mega-selling Unreal Tournament franchise, to retail stores worldwide this week. The game has already received a 5 out of 5 stars on GameSpy.com and a 9.4 out of 10 on IGN.com, two of the premiere video game news and reviews Web sites. Both

sites gave the game their Editor’s Choice Award.

"With Unreal Tournament 2004, Epic, Atari, Digital Extremes and Co. have done more than return the series to its former glory - they’ve unleashed a monster that could dominate multiplayer gaming for the rest of 2004," according to GameSpy.com’s review. IGN.com agreed, saying "Unreal Tournament 2004 is set to make a thunderous impact as big as (or bigger) than the one caused by the original Unreal Tournament."

Unreal Tournament 2004 was developed by Epic Games in conjunction with Digital Extremes. The game builds on the success of past installments, taking the franchise to the next level with the introduction of the hyper-charged Onslaught mode, the return of the fan-favorite Assault mode, which last appeared in the original Unreal Tournament, and the introduction of land-, air- and space-based vehicles.

Gamers worldwide made the free, downloadable demo of Unreal Tournament 2004 one of the most popular game demo downloads of all time, with more than 1.5 million downloads in the first week of availability. The official demo first hit the Internet on Wednesday, February 11, and was distributed on a worldwide scale.

In Unreal Tournament 2004, players suit up as the ultimate techno-gladiator of the future, taking their fates into their own hands as they battle up to 32 other players in action-packed, frag-filled arenas. Unreal Tournament 2004 contains new maps for all established game modes, including Capture the Flag, Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, Bombing Run and Double Domination, as well as all new arenas for the two additional styles of play - Onslaught and Assault. In addition, Unreal Tournament 2004 contains all of the maps, mutators and game types - such as Mutant, Last Man Standing and Invasion - from Unreal Tournament 2003 and the free downloadable bonus packs for that game.

Features in Unreal Tournament 2004 include:

* Onslaught Mode: Onslaught is an epic-in-scope team-based challenge that pits two teams in bitter warfare across massive terrain maps in a frag-filled battle to destroy, capture and hold key power nodes. Vehicles play a major role as war-hardened flying and driving machines transport combatants to the "front" and serve as mobile platforms to launch devastating attacks on the enemy.
* Assault Mode: In the completely redesigned Assault mode, gamers are challenged to complete a variety of mission objectives to attack or defend bases in a bigger and badder version of the Unreal Tournament classic; many Assault maps require the use of vehicles as a critical gameplay element.
* Vehicles: Unreal Tournament 2004 features a variety of land-, space- and air-based vehicles, including buggies, tanks, hovercraft, aircraft and more.
* Voice Technology: Integrated voice communications, including voice-over-IP technology to allow real-time chat with teammates and opponents during gameplay; voice recognition, allowing players to issue orders to computer controlled bots; and, text-to-voice conversion of typed chat. Voice chat includes 3D audio on supported sound cards, so players can sense where voices emanate from.
* New and Revised Weapons: The devastating arsenal of bone-crunching weaponry that Unreal has become famous for returns, with several enhancements, including model and texture updates as well as sound improvements. The game also includes all new weaponry for the massive Onslaught and Assault battles, including the armor-shredding AVRiL

(Anti-Vehicle Rocket Launcher) to take down incoming vehicles, the Grenade Launcher, which discharges sticky explosives on enemy emplacements, vehicles and personnel, the Spider Mines, which are brutal arachnid bombs that scuttle the landscape searching for unsuspecting adversaries, and a completely redesigned and reintroduced Sniper Rifle, not seen since the original Unreal Tournament.

* Characters: New and classic fan-favorite Unreal characters join The Tournament to challenge players, including the vicious Skaarj and the infamous Xan Kriegor.
* New Maps: More than 100 levels are included in the game for all new and existing gametypes, featuring tons of new textures, static meshes and music. In total, Unreal Tournament 2004 ships with more never-before-seen maps than the entire number of maps that shipped with Unreal Tournament 2003!
* UnrealTV: A match broadcast system that allows for hundreds of people to view an Unreal Tournament 2004 match with minimal performance impact on a game server, creating a television sports like viewing environment for fans to watch professional and other matches.
* Voting: Complete end-user voting system allows users to choose game type, maps, mutators, rules and settings and enables players to remove troublesome competitors from the game. Custom clan-match voting system allows clans to negotiate acceptable game settings prior to a competitive match.
* New User Interface: A completely redesigned user interface (UI) is easier to navigate and supports context-sensitive menus, an in-game login menu (to improve team balancing) and an improved server browser with enhanced server filtering options. The underlying user interface system has been reengineered to be easier for Mod authors to build menus and implement their own UI designs.
* Other Improvements: Tons of cool gameplay tweaks and refinements including unique crosshairs for each weapon, the ability to carry dual Assault Rifles, improved computer-controlled "Bot" team coordination and movement, network bandwidth usage optimizations and more!
* Unreal Editor: Unreal Tournament 2004 will ship with the most powerful game creation toolsets ever released to the public - the same software the developers used to make the game. Amateur level designers and mod makers can use the Unreal Editor, including the Unreal Editor’s "Matinee" tool, to make their own maps, new game modes and animated movies using the Unreal Technology.

Unreal Tournament 2004 is available worldwide this week, in both a standard and a "Special Edition" format. Unreal Tournament 2004 DVD Special Edition is a double-DVD set - disk one includes all of the game content while disk two includes hours of Video Training Modules (VTMs) from 3D Buzz that teach fans and amateur mod makers how to use the Unreal Editor to create custom game content. Unreal Tournament 2004 DVD Special Edition comes in a limited edition metal box and contains a Logitech Internet Chat Headset for use with the game’s exclusive voice-over-IP (voice chat) technology.

For more information on Unreal Tournament 2004 or to download the free demo, please visit the game’s official Web site at www.unrealtournament.com.

=~=~=~=

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: David Newman
Tel 610.527.5325
david@phillyclassic.com

March 15, 2004

PhillyClassic Celebrates Video Games from Vintage to Vanguard

Philadelphia, PA - From the latest games to the good old classics, if it goes ZAP, you'll find it at the PhillyClassic videogame expo this weekend at the Valley Forge Convention Center in King of Prussia, PA.

Space Invaders. Missile Command. Centipede. And of course Asteroids, Pac-Man, and Pong. "To those pushing 40, like me, those names can trigger fond memories of hours playing video games in the arcades and at home," says PhillyClassic founder David Newman, of Bryn Mawr, PA.

To Jeff Ladd, age 12, they're just fun. The Bensalem, PA game fan owns all the latest hardware - Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 2, Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox, and Nintendo's Gamecube. "But I like the classics, too," he said while shopping for game cartridges for the venerable Atari 2600 game system during last year's PhillyClassic expo.

Ladd has lots of company. Classic video games - starting with 1972's Pong and peaking with the Atari craze of the early '80s - are again enjoying a surge of interest right alongside the mega-hits of today's latest video game technology.

That surge has fueled the growth of PhillyClassic, the East Coast's largest convention for fans of video games old and new. In 2000, the first such event drew 50 gamers. Last year's PhillyClassic 4 drew over 1,000 gamers of all ages.

Many were a few years either side of 30. "That's the Generation X'ers growing up and buying back our childhoods," said Cassidy Nolen, 29, of Arlington, VA.

Others inherited the interest. "Our father had an Atari 2600, and we grew up playing that," said Chris Chandler, 21, of Wilmington, DE. Chandler is an avid video game collector, player, and a regular exhibitor at the PhillyClassic expo.

Looking for vintage systems such as Atari, Mattel Inc.'s 1980 Intellivision or Coleco Inc.'s early-'80s ColecoVision? Or for games, accessories, and memorabilia? They're all here for sale, trade, and hands-on play, right along with the latest titles for PS2, Xbox, Gamecube, and Gameboy Advance SP.

A growing number of new game cartridges are available for classic systems, developed and sold by entrepreneurial enthusiasts. Albert Yarusso of Austin,

TX runs AtariAge.com, a PhillyClassic partner. AtariAge.com is the leading source for homebrew and re-released games for classic video game systems, such as the Atari 2600, Atari 5200, and ColecoVision. Many new titles for these systems will be debuting, and many more will be available for hands-on play during this year's fifth annual PhillyClassic expo, dubbed PhillyClassic 5.

Want the best of both old and new? Some major game publishers reissue retro classics for play on modern game platforms. Last year, Activision Inc. released the $20 "Activision Anthology" for PlayStation 2, with more than 40 vintage games set to a soundtrack of '80s hits. More recently, Midway released "Midway Arcade Treasures," containing over 20 classic arcade games for the Nintendo Gamecube.

Arcade games more your style? PhillyClassic will have over 75 of them set on free play awaiting eager joystick jockeys - no quarters required.

And for those who need a game fix always close at hand, Nokia last spring debuted the N-Gage portable game deck, featuring a wide spectrum of games, from retro hits like Sonic and Puzzle Bobble to Tony Hawk Pro Skater, featuring wireless online play. And the device doubles as a cell phone and MP3 player for gamers on the go. PhillyClassic will offer visitors a chance to enjoy some hands-on time with the device.

After years of cult status, "classic games are getting mainstream attention now," Newman said. "In the last three or four years, it's really started to come to the forefront." He links it to the recent rage for everything retro - lava lamps, the Mini Cooper, bell bottoms, "That '70s Show."

"Especially in today's complex times of global uncertainty and economic worries, it's like meatloaf and mashed potatoes... a return to simpler things," he said.

"By my definition, classic games don't necessarily mean old school games, either," Newman continued. When asked for a definition of classic videogames, Newman quotes the ad slogan for Othello, the enduring Mattel board game slightly more intricate than tic-tac-toe: "A minute to learn, a lifetime to master. The novice can pick up the basics of an oldie like Pac-Man or a new title like Tony Hawk's Underground in seconds. But a player's success takes practice, skill, a little memorization, and some strategy. It fires off a lot of neurons in your head," Newman said.

The 5th annual PhillyClassic video game expo blasts into the Valley Forge Convention Center in King of Prussia, PA on March 20-21, 2004. Show hours are Saturday 10am-8pm and Sunday 10am-5pm. Admission is $10 for 1 day ($5 with student ID) and $15 for both days. Kids under 10 are free if accompanied by an adult (1 child per adult).

For more information, and to register to win t-shirts, prizes, and other goodies at the show, please visit the PhillyClassic website at: http://www.phillyclassic.com

=~=~=~=

Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

EU Backs Commission Antitrust Plan Vs Microsoft

European Union states on Monday unanimously threw their weight behind a landmark ruling against Microsoft that would find it broke antitrust law and seek changes in how it sells audiovisual software.

Microsoft also faces the prospect of a fine expected to run into hundreds of millions of euros as part of the European Commission's sanctions against the company. Microsoft is certain to appeal any EU decision it does not like.

"I've just been informed that the meeting is over and that the member states have unanimously backed the Commission's draft decision," said Commission competition spokeswoman Amelia Torres.

She was referring to a meeting of competition experts from the 15 EU states, which backed Commission recommendations on steps to take against Microsoft.

The EU advisory committee's views are not binding but make chances of a settlement more remote with only nine days until a final decision by the full European Commission.

The Commission draft backed by the experts requires that Microsoft provide computer makers with a second version of Windows stripped of built-in audiovisual software, people close to the case said.

Microsoft spokesman Tom Brookes said after the meeting that the company was still working to find a settlement with the Commission.

But a competition expert saw a compromise as being tough.

"The Commission's already got the opinion of the member states that these are the right remedies. To substitute different remedies now would be very difficult," said David Wood, a competition lawyer with Howrey Simon in Brussels.

The EU advisory committee will meet again on March 22 to decide whether to endorse the proposed fine, with the Commission's final ruling coming two days later.

The Commission fine-tuned the decision to stand up to scrutiny by EU courts in Luxembourg.

Microsoft acknowledges that Windows, which runs on nearly all personal computers, is dominant. The Commission draft says the company abused that dominance in two areas, sources say.

First, Microsoft tried to hurt rival makers of audiovisual software by bundling its Windows Media Player with Windows.

The draft requires Microsoft ship two versions of Windows to computer makers, which account for most sales of the operating system, for installation in computers sold in Europe.

One version would have Microsoft Windows Media Player tied in as it is now, the other would have it stripped out.

The aim is to free computer makers to sell Windows bundled with rival audiovisual software such as RealNetworks RealPlayer or Apple Quicktime, the sources say.

Microsoft says Windows Media Player is built in and removing it would damage the operating system. RealNetworks has used demonstrations at an EU hearing to argue it can be removed.

Second, the draft says Microsoft has given rival makers of low-level servers too little information to compete.

As a result, Microsoft’s low-level servers, performing tasks such as printing and file handling, work better with Windows.

The draft decision says the U.S. firm must share more of its protocols with rivals, charging a reasonable royalty. It will be left to Microsoft to work out the precise solution, with close oversight by the Commission, the sources said.

The draft gives Microsoft a deadline to get its house in order or face additional action.

Unlike the United States system, where a judge makes the initial decision, in Europe the Commission hands down a ruling and courts provide an avenue for appeal.

The company’s first move would be to ask a court to suspend the Commission ruling until the case is completed, which could take three to four years and be subject to further appeal.

The EU Court of First Instance may grant suspension, deny it, or ask the parties’ consent to put the case on a one-year fast track and, if both sides agree, freeze remedies.

Microsoft, EU in Top-Level Talks as Deadline Nears

Microsoft’s chief executive met the European Union competition czar on Tuesday in a dramatic final bid to settle a landmark antitrust case, eight days before Brussels was set to rule against the U.S. software giant.

Disclosing no details after the surprise talks between Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer and Chief Counsel Brad Smith and EU Competition Commissioner Mario Monti, both sides said only that the dialogue would continue.

"Yes, there’s been a meeting today. Discussions are ongoing. That’s all I’ll say," Monti’s spokeswoman Amelia Torres told reporters.

"Discussions are ongoing," Microsoft spokesman Tom Brookes echoed.

The negotiations came at the moment of maximum leverage for Monti, a day after EU governments threw their weight behind a draft ruling that would find Microsoft broke antitrust law and require it to change the way it sells audiovisual software.

On Monday, the 15 member countries will endorse a fine expected to run into hundreds of millions of euros, and on March 24 the full Commission is due to approve a ruling that would find Microsoft illegally abused its market dominance to crush smaller rivals.

If Ballmer and Smith can convince Monti to settle the case, there would be no legal finding against the company.

Twice before, in 1994 and 1997, the Commission settled charges against Microsoft without a formal ruling.

The decision may be Monti’s toughest in five years as the EU’s top competition regulator.

If he settles, Monti would avoid the certainty of a Microsoft challenge in European courts which have overturned several of his department’s rulings in the last two years.

But past settlements have not altered Microsoft’s business practices in Europe sufficiently to avoid new charges.

If Monti rejects a deal, he would gain a precedent-setting ruling which could make future action against Microsoft easier.

But the case could be tied up for years in the Luxembourg-based courts while the disputed practices continue.

Tuesday’s meeting was not announced, but word spread and a clutch of reporters and camera crews huddled outside the green steel and glass building housing the Commission’s Competition directorate during the hours-long meeting.

Ballmer and Smith were spirited in and out of the building in a black panelled van with dark glass windows, painted with the words "Aalst Wieze" - a garage in Flanders.

No Deal in EU, Microsoft Antitrust Case

Microsoft failed on Thursday to reach a deal with the European Commission, setting the stage for a landmark antitrust ruling next week that will brand the software giant an abusive monopolist.

It will be fined and ordered to offer a version of its Windows operating system without Windows Media Player to encourage computer makers to provide other audio-visual software. Its shares were down 1.8 percent at $24.68 in midday U.S. trade.

The decision comes after a decade of probes and legal battles, including several cases in which the Commission took action to prevent Microsoft from using its dominant position to crush smaller rivals.

This time the Commission wanted a binding promise from Microsoft to change the way it does business in Europe, putting an end to a pattern of bringing one case after another and getting new settlements each time.

"I’d just like to inform you that a settlement on the Microsoft case has not been possible," Competition Commissioner Mario Monti said as he made a

surprise appearance at the EU executive’s daily news briefing.

Monti met Microsoft Chief Executive Steve Ballmer three days in a row, once for four hours.

"We were unable to agree on principles for new issues that could arise in the future," Ballmer said in a statement.

A major issue in the case had been Microsoft’s efforts to damage rival makers of audio-visual software by allegedly tying its Windows Media Player to the Windows operating system.

Microsoft itself was willing to go further than a Commission plan requiring it to supply a second version of Windows stripped of built-in audiosivual software.

Microsoft was also willing to sell information to rival makers of server software so their products, which run on Linux and Unix operating systems, could work more easily with Windows.

But in Monti’s view, the heart of the case went deeper than today’s problems. Two more Microsoft cases are already under investigation, again focusing on the question of abuse of monopoly power.

Next Wednesday Microsoft will be formally held to have abused its dominant market position in the European Union, as it was in a 2001 final appeals court ruling in the United States.

"The aspect of setting a clear and strong legal precedent is indeed of key importance," Monti said. "It is very important to have such a precedent to guide the conduct of such a dominant company in cases which are either there or on the horizon."

That may open the way for further legal action against Microsoft in all European Union countries - 25 of them after May 1 - if the company is seen to be competing unfairly.

"We’re talking about an issue of enforcing respect for the rules," said Michael Reynolds, a lawyer with Allen and Overy who filed the first complaint in the case for Sun Microsystems in 1998.

Microsoft said it has given up hopes of a settlement for now and expects a drawn-out fight on appeal. It announced plans to take the Commission to court after the formal decision next week.

"Today is just another step in what could be a long process," Microsoft general counsel Brad Smith said in a statement.

"I hope that perhaps we can still settle the case at a later stage," Ballmer said. Microsoft settled with the U.S. Justice Department, but only long after a final court decision found that it had abused monopoly power.

The Commission draft proposal calls on Microsoft to offer two versions of Windows to computer makers, one with Windows Media Player embedded and one without it.

Microsoft contends it cannot do so without crippling Windows to the point where it doesn’t work properly.

But a rival audio-visual software maker, RealNetworks, gave a

demonstration to the Commission at a hearing to argue that Windows Media Player could be removed without harm.

The exact size of the fine will be approved by a meeting of member states on Monday.

State Case Against Microsoft Begins

Microsoft Corp. improperly overcharged for licenses for its Windows operating system and two other popular programs, a lawyer said Monday as the first class-action, antitrust trial in a state court opened against the software giant.

The case, being heard by a jury in Hennepin County District Court, involves alleged overcharging for Windows and the company's Word and Excel programs. The outcome could affect nearly 1 million individuals and businesses.

The plaintiffs are seeking damages between $283 million and $425 million for alleged overcharges on about 9.7 million Microsoft software licenses issued in Minnesota from 1994 to 2001.

Plaintiff's attorney Gene Crew described to jurors the antitrust laws that he said applied in the case and then said: "Microsoft broke those rules of fair play. They broke the law. It's that simple."

Microsoft attorneys were scheduled to make their opening statements on Tuesday, but outside the courtroom Monday they denied the allegations.

"We didn't overcharge anyone, and people got good value," said Steven Aeschbacher, Microsoft assistant general counsel.

Microsoft has reached settlements in nine states and Washington, D.C., totaling $1.5 billion, including $1.1 billion in California. Cases were dismissed in 16 other states.

Aeschbacher declined to comment on whether there were any ongoing settlement talks in the Minnesota trial, which is expected to last 15 weeks.

Microsoft lost a closely watched antitrust case to the federal government in 1999.

In that case, Microsoft was found to have illegally monopolized the operating system market using Windows. The trial judge ordered a breakup of Microsoft, but a federal circuit court overruled the decision. It did, however, uphold the judgment that Microsoft held a monopoly with Windows.

District Judge Bruce A. Peterson told jurors on Monday about the federal case, but noted that the state case involved other Microsoft products and covered a slightly different time period.

PayPal Warns Its Customers To Safeguard Personal Data

Online payment giant PayPal warned users yesterday that scam artists have

obtained select customer aliases, mailing addresses, e-mail addresses and transaction data by using phony e-mails to fool retailers into revealing the information.

The company said it appeared no personal financial information had been disclosed. But officials said they worried that the fraudulently obtained data could be used to deceive consumers into turning over credit card numbers and other sensitive information.

PayPal is a widely used online payment service that allows Web users to transfer money to each other electronically. PayPal handles the transaction, and neither side sees the other's financial information. Founded in 1998 in San Jose, the company was bought by Internet auctioneer eBay Inc., a major source of new PayPal accounts, four years later. The company now has 40 million customers.

Amanda Pires, a spokeswoman for PayPal, wouldn't identify which merchants were taken in by the scheme or the number of customers whose information might have been exposed. She characterized the number of companies as a "very, very small percentage" of PayPal's millions of merchants.

The companies were apparently sent legitimate-looking e-mails claiming to be from PayPal that asked for password and other account information. The passwords gave the fraudsters access to customer rosters and other sales data, but not to actual credit card or bank account numbers, according to PayPal.

That financial information is stored on secure computer servers that cannot be accessed by any merchant or third party, the company said.

Still, with customer names and other personal information, PayPal officials warned that scammers could direct their "phishing" expeditions toward the customers themselves and seek to trick them into revealing financial information.

For example, scam artists have sent phony PayPal e-mails to users advising them their account would be placed on a "restricted status" until they completed a "credit card confirmation process" online at bogus Web sites designed to look like ones belonging to PayPal.

While such schemes are usually sent blindly to millions of e-mail addresses in the hope of fooling a few Internet users, PayPal warned that scammers using the purloined personal information might achieve a higher rate of success by strategically including some of a user's data. For instance, they might refer to a recent purchase.

"These e-mails could be very, very specific and could deceive people," Pires said, adding that PayPal has not yet seen evidence of fraudulent e-mails resulting from the security breach.

Pires said PayPal does not ask for personal financial information via e-mail and does not refer to old transactions through e-mail.

Pires said that the company grew suspicious last week after noticing some unusual activity in the accounts of one of its merchants. When the company found that more than one of its merchants had been duped by the scam, the company decided to warn the public and posted a notice on its Web site Friday afternoon.

Bruce Schneier, a computer security expert, characterized the scam as

"really bad news."

"The more data an attacker gets, the more effective they'll be," he said. "This attack bypasses security and attacks the user directly. It's like me convincing you to give me your ATM card and your PIN."

But David Ricci, an analyst at William Blair & Co. - and a PayPal user - credited PayPal for spotting the scam and alerting users. "The company is fastidious about its commitment to safety in all respects," he said.

Cori Martinell, a Washington resident who uses PayPal largely to make purchases related to her knitting hobby, took the alert in stride yesterday.

"Maybe I should worry about my privacy, but it doesn't bother me if people want to know about the ridiculous amount of money I spend on yarn," she wrote in an e-mail.

Experts Downplay Phatbot Danger

Security experts downplayed the danger of a Trojan horse program named Phatbot that uses peer to peer technology to create a network of infected zombies for carrying out attacks or spreading malicious code.

Antivirus experts at two security companies say that Phatbot is a low level threat, one day after a Washington Post report warned of hundreds of thousands of infections from the program and cited an alert issued by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

"I think there are a lot of people getting very excited about something that's not very important," says Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant at Sophos.

The DHS did not respond to a request for comment on Phatbot.

Trojan horse is a term used to describe malicious computer programs that hide inside other, benign software or runs surreptitiously on a computer. Trojans can give remote attackers access to the machines on which they run or receive and respond to remotely issued commands.

Phatbot spreads by infecting computers running vulnerable versions of Microsoft's Windows operating system. Phatbot can spot machines with a number of high profile Windows holes, including the DCOM vulnerability that spawned the Blaster worm.

It can also find and infect machines that have an open "back door" created by the Mydoom worm, according to managed security services company Lurhq.

When it is installed on infected machines, the Phatbot Trojan joins a P-to-P network similar to Kazaa or Gnutella. The network uses a specially developed communications protocol that allows infected computers to identify and communicate with each other, transmit commands and share infected files, says Joe Stewart, a senior security researcher at Lurhq.

The Phatbot software supports a long list of commands that can be used by remote attackers to cause infected machines to launch a denial of service attack, scan the Internet for vulnerable Windows computers to infect, or

update their Phatbot software. Phatbot-infected systems find each other using the same servers that clients running the Gnutella P-to-P software use, but use a different communications protocol and listen on a different communications port, which keeps them separate from the Gnutella clients, he says.

The remote control aspect of Phatbot makes it very similar to so-called "IRC bots," that use Internet Relay Chat software and servers to communicate, he says. However, unlike IRC bots, the Phatbot software does not rely on IRC servers to communicate with each other and coordinate their efforts, Stewart says.

"It gives [the Phatbot authors] the ability to be a little bit more discreet, because they don't have to connect to an IRC server where an administrator could notice and shut down their channel," he says.

In fact, Phatbot is just the latest generation of a long line of IRC bots known as "Agobot," or "Gaobot," Sophos and Lurhq say. "We've seen hundreds of versions of [Agobot] over the past few weeks," Cluley says, noting that Sophos, which assigns a letter to each new variant, recently identified Agobot "FG."

"That means we've been around the alphabet five times!" he says.

The Trojans, including P-to-P Trojans like Phatbot, are a nuisance and a threat to users running vulnerable versions of Windows, but are not a new threat, Cluley and Stewart agree.

Contrary to reports of hundreds of thousands of infected hosts, Sophos has received only two or three reports from customers about Phatbot infections. Stewart says that he has joined the Phatbot network using an infected host and saw "around 1000" infected hosts on the network in one hour. "It really wasn't a big deal. I'm surprised there's been so much attention to it," he says.

Regular operating system patching, antivirus updates, and firewall software will prevent infections from Phatbot and similar threats, Cluley and Stewart say.

New Law Has Little Effect on Spam

"Spam" e-mail is proving more irritating than ever to U.S. Internet users since a national anti-spam law took effect Jan. 1, according to a survey released on Wednesday.

Internet users are more likely to say e-mail is less trustworthy and less reliable than when they were surveyed in June, the Pew Internet and American Life Project found.

Internet users also are more likely to say spam has made the online experience unpleasant, the nonprofit research group said.

Get-rich-quick schemes, miracle cures and other unsolicited bulk messages accounted for 62 percent of all e-mail in February, according to filtering company Brightmail Inc.

The 1,371 Internet users surveyed by Pew between Feb. 3 and March 1 said

they have seen little change since the law took effect.

Slightly more than half said they saw no change in the amount of spam they received at home or work.

Twenty-nine percent said they had reduced their use of e-mail because of spam, up from 25 percent who said so last June.

Sixty-three percent said spam made them less trusting of e-mail in general, up from 52 percent, and 77 percent said the flood of spam made the act of being online unpleasant and annoying, up from 70 percent.

The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Spam Erodes U.S. Trust in E-Mail

Americans are e-mailing less and trusting e-mail less because of the growing flood of junk messages, a survey finds.

Twenty-nine percent of e-mail users have reduced their overall use of the medium, according to the Pew Internet and American Life Project. The snapshot from last month is higher than the 25 percent recorded in June, though still within the margin of sampling error.

Meanwhile, 63 percent of e-mail users say they are less trusting of e-mail overall because of spam. That’s up from 52 percent in June.

The Jan. 1 enactment of a federal law restricting junk messages has had little effect on spam, according to the survey. Among those with personal e-mail accounts, 53 percent saw no change and 24 percent saw an increase. Only 20 percent got less.

The random telephone-based survey of 1,253 adult e-mail users in the United States has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. It was conducted Feb. 3 to March 1.

States May Go After Music P2Ps

A letter first circulated to peer-to-peer music Web sites and then to the media suggests that state attorneys general might be getting ready to prosecute file-sharing activity on Kazaa and similar Internet sites.

One draft of the letter that reportedly is in circulation begins: "We write to express our growing concern over the risks posed to consumers in our States from the use of your company’s peer-to-peer (P2P) file-sharing software - and your firm’s inadequate response to those risks. As the chief law-enforcement officers and primary consumer advocates for our States, we share a unique responsibility to ensure our laws are respected and our consumers are informed about, and protected from, dangerous products and services."

Representatives of the targeted sites have expressed concern for a number of reasons. One, it appears that music and movie industry representatives have collaborated on the draft.

The metadata associated with the document identifies the author as "stevensonv," identified by P2P United as Vans Stevenson, senior vice president for state legislative affairs at the Motion Picture Association of America, according to Adam Eisgrau, executive director of the P2P trade association.

"This is case of industry seeking to inappropriately influence public policy, as clearly MPAA and RIAA stand to benefit if the states get involved," Eisgrau told NewsFactor.

"But our principal problem with the letter is that it is devoid of factual context for many of its claims," Eisgrau continued. The overall tone suggests that the P2P networks are the sole conduits of child porn, he said.

"Of course, the problem of child porn is awful and must be stamped out - and we are, in fact, working on that at P2P United - but it is a problem that exists throughout the Internet world, not solely in the P2P world," Eisgrau pointed out.

The letter, a draft of which Eisgrau has reviewed, is sufficiently vague that it is difficult to tell what the end result might be if state attorneys general do begin prosecuting such Web sites.

If nothing else, it is clear that state-level prosecution and enforcement will open up another front in the file-sharing war.

Google Rolls Out Local Search System

Online search engine leader Google Inc. is introducing a new system designed to make it easier for people to find things closer to their homes, paving the way for the company to make more money selling ads to small businesses.

The new algorithmic formulas unveiled Wednesday allow Google to display more local information in response to search requests that include a ZIP code or a city’s name.

Google says these geographic queries are now more likely to generate phone numbers and specific addresses on its main results page. In many cases, Google also will display an icon of a compass that can be clicked upon to open another page containing a detailed map and directions to the location.

Web surfers who want a broader selection of parochial information will be encouraged to visit a new gateway, http://local.google.com.

"Google’s goal is to connect searchers with the information they need whether it’s halfway around the world or in their neighborhood," said company co-founder Sergey Brin.

With the new features, Google is joining an accelerating push to become more local in search. Last week, Yahoo! Inc. introduced a similar provincial tool, called SmartView, and Verizon Communications recently overhauled its SuperPages.com site to deliver more useful local results.

Mountain View, Calif.-based Google believes it will have a major advantage

over its other rivals - the Internet’s biggest index, consisting of 4.3 billion Web pages.

The emphasis on more local search results reflects an emerging change in how people are hunting data online.

As more homes sign up for high-speed Internet connections that make it easier to call up Web pages, people increasingly are turning to the Internet before the Yellow Pages for business referrals, said Greg Sterling, who studies local search for The Kelsey Group.

About 70 percent of Google users seeking information about a merchant are primarily interested in local results, said Marissa Mayer, Google’s director of consumer Web products. "People like to find and buy things in their neighborhoods."

Despite their rising popularity, Google and the other search engines still haven’t found a way to siphon much of the estimated $22 billion that small businesses spend annually on local ads in the Yellow Pages, newspapers and direct mail, Sterling said.

By making it easier to find local information, Google hopes to entice more small businesses to buy text-based ads that eventually will be displayed next to its search results, Mayer said. But Google won’t begin selling ad space next to the local search results until the new feature is better established and small businesses see how the system works.

Text-based ads tied to search results, often called "pay-for-performance," have become a lucrative business for Google, Yahoo and a wide range of other Web sites. Merchants spent an estimated $2 billion on the ads last year and most industry observers believe the market has barely been tapped.

New Software Seeks Out Chatroom Pedophiles

A British computer programmer has created sophisticated new software that detects pedophiles trying to contact children in Internet chatrooms.

The program works by giving a convincing impression of a young person taking part in a chatroom conversation, while at the same time analyzing the behavior of the person it is chatting with.

Internet chatrooms are seen as areas where youngsters are at most risk of "grooming" - the term used to describe a pedophile building up a rapport with a victim.

The ChatNannies program was developed by IT consultant Jim Whightman, the New Scientist magazine reported Wednesday.

It creates thousands of sub-programs, called nanniebots, which log on to different chatrooms and strike up conversations with users and user groups.

If the program detects any suspicious activity, it e-mails a transcript of the conversation to Whightman, who then decides if the police should be contacted.

"If this software works, then it would be marvelous because there is

nothing like this out there," said Chris Atkinson, Internet safety officer with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in Britain.

Whightman said he had 100,000 nanniebots circulating around chatrooms.

But in a qualification of its apparent endorsement of the product, the NSPCC later issued a statement also quoting Atkinson.

"We view this software with some skepticism. It is not clear how this will work to prevent the online grooming of children," she said.

"It is very difficult for professionals as well as parents and children to detect a child being groomed, and even more so for software."

Hotmail, MSN Hit With Another Outage

Technical problems at Microsoft for the second time within a week caused trouble for users trying to connect to Hotmail and MSN Messenger, the company says.

Users around the globe reported that they had problems signing on to the Hotmail and MSN Messenger services on Thursday.

The outage lasted approximately three hours, from 5:00 p.m. GMT until 8:00 p.m. GMT.

Microsoft in a statement says it identified an issue that caused log-on and connectivity issues on some MSN services for a portion of its customers and has since solved it.

The company did not specify the scope of the problem.

The outage also affected connectivity for MSN Internet Access customers, Microsoft says.

The company blames the problems on an unspecified internal problem and says it has no indication of any external causes such as cyberattacks.

Although to users the problem was essentially the same, Microsoft says that this week’s problems are different from those that caused an approximately eight-hour outage last Friday.

Famous British Wills Available Online

When William Shakespeare bequeathed his "second-best bed" to his wife nearly 400 years ago, a scribe dipped his quill pen in ink and scratched the bard’s last wishes on parchment.

Now the public can see the playwright’s final will and testament on a computer screen with the click of a mouse.

The document is among more than 1 million wills, spanning five centuries, that Britain’s National Archives posted on the Internet this week for

public access.

About 100 wills dated from 1384 to 1858 have been collated in a special section befitting their famous authors, including Jane Austen, Captain James Cook and Napoleon Bonaparte.

Shakespeare’s is free to download, but the others cost $5.40 each.

"This is a fantastic resource that can bring history so much closer to us," said Tony Robinson, host of the television archaeology program "Time Team." "We can now all be historical researchers in the comfort of our own homes."

Shakespeare’s will is considered to be of particular significance because it contains three of the six surviving examples of his signature.

Dated March 25, 1616 - less than a month before he died - it begins with the Bard hoping that, after death, he will "be made partaker of lyfe everlastinge."

The playwright goes on to request that his fortune be divided among his family, with some money going to the poor of his hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon. He bequeaths the bed to his wife, his sword to Thomas Combe and a silver bowl to his daughter Judith.

The 1824 will of French leader Napoleon Bonaparte, who asks his son to adopt his motto "Everything for the French people," is accompanied by an extract from his personal diary.

Similarly, Lord Horatio Nelson’s 1803 will is accompanied by his private diary, written in September and October 1805.

"Pride and Prejudice" author Jane Austen bequeaths her 800-pound estate - worth about $124,000 in today’s dollars - to her "dearest" sister, Cassandra Elizabeth, in her 1817 will. Henry, her brother, gets only 50 pounds, or about $7,800 today.

Naval hero Sir Francis Drake asks to be buried at sea, with two of his favorite ships sunk nearby, in his 1596 will.

Other wills available include those of Oliver Cromwell (dated 1687), the Duke of Wellington (1818), Captain James Cook (1776), John Donne (1616), and William Wordsworth (1847).

DotComGuy Seeks An End to the Internet Life

He spent four years as "DotComGuy," including a year holed up in a Dallas home living entirely off the Internet.

Now he will go back to being just plain Mitch Maddox, legally changing his name back, to the delight of his wife, whom he met - where else? - on the Internet.

Maddox got worldwide attention in 2000 when he legally changed his name to DotComGuy, in a promotion aimed at demonstrating how the Internet could be used for food, furniture and other necessities.

With sponsors including United Parcel Service, 3Com, Network Solutions,

Piper Jaffray and Travelocity, he spent the entire year of 2000 in his home in Dallas Texas, living off the Internet.

All food and other necessities were ordered off the Internet and delivered to the home he never left.

But now, he wants to get his old name back, and is auctioning off the DotComGuy.com domain name.

"From a business perspective, I've taken DotComGuy as far as I can," he told AFP in an e-mail message.

"Now, it's time to let someone else leverage the brand for their own success. On a personal level, I must admit it's been a lot of fun being 'DotComGuy,' but I'm glad that I can move on with my family name."

Spokeswoman Kelly Kitchens said a confidentiality agreement and other contractual commitments kept DotComGuy out of the limelight over the past three years, although he has been working "an eight-to-five" job as a systems manager with a Dallas real estate firm.

"Basically he wants to change his name back," Kitchens said. "DotComGuy is on his drivers license, his passport, even on his marriage license."

What about his wife?

Kitchens said DotComGuy met his wife on the Internet, but only after he completed his year in cyberspace.

"His wife is very happy to not be known as Mrs. DotComGuy," according to Kitchens.

"I met my wife online in the fall of 2001," Maddox said. "Towards the end of our first date, I told her I was DotComGuy. If it wasn't for that we may have never gotten married because her older sister commented, 'You need to go out with that DotComGuy; he's the perfect personality for my crazy Anne.'"

=~=~=~=

Atari Online News, Etc. is a weekly publication covering the entire Atari community. Reprint permission is granted, unless otherwise noted at the beginning of any article, to Atari user groups and not for profit publications only under the following terms: articles must remain unedited and include the issue number and author at the top of each article reprinted. Other reprints granted upon approval of request. Send requests to: dpj@atarinews.org

No issue of Atari Online News, Etc. may be included on any commercial media, nor uploaded or transmitted to any commercial online service or internet site, in whole or in part, by any agent or means, without the expressed consent or permission from the Publisher or Editor of Atari Online News, Etc.

Opinions presented herein are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the staff, or of the publishers. All

material herein is believed to be accurate at the time of publishing.